

An Evaluation of DirecTrack to Teaching

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Background

DirecTrack to Teaching is a supporting program offered to undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities who are interested in pursuing a career in K-12 teaching. In 2017, DirecTrack to Teaching was relocated from the Office of Teacher Education to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. The staff member/graduate student working with DirecTrack to Teaching saw that program had long been known as a growing and successful program, but there had not been a formal evaluation to determine the effectiveness of this program.

DirecTrack to Teaching was formed in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota in 2007. The program was formed because, outside of Elementary Education Foundations, there are no undergraduate degrees that provide a clear pathway to the University of Minnesota K-12 initial licensure programs (offered at the M.Ed. level). DirecTrack to Teaching exists to give students the opportunity to explore the teaching profession at an undergraduate level, connects students to other future teachers, and prepares students for beginning the M.Ed./initial licensure program at the graduate level. DirecTrack to Teaching meets the needs of future educators who want to be involved in education while completing their undergraduate degrees in their specific content areas.

At the University of Minnesota, K-12 M.Ed./initial licensure programs are offered at the graduate level. Students interested in pursuing their teaching license enter a M.Ed. program with a focus area based on license content area. Each content area has an extensive list of prerequisite coursework that students must have completed, or nearly

completed, before beginning the M.Ed./initial licensure program. Program length varies by program area where students in some content areas are eligible for their teaching license and complete their M.Ed. in one year, while students in other content areas are eligible for their teaching license after one year but have several additional courses to complete before they can obtain the M.Ed.

Students apply to DirecTrack to Teaching at the end of their first or second year of college and begin DirectTrack to Teaching the Fall semester of their second or third year. Students in DirecTrack to Teaching take two required courses for two credits each: CI 3901 Exploring the Teaching Profession I and CI 3902 Exploring the Teaching Profession II. These courses meet in person every other week, and require students to complete 100 hours of service learning in local secondary classrooms. In addition to the coursework requirements, students take teaching-related coursework when they're not in the DirecTrack to Teaching courses, participate in at least two professional development activities each semester, participate in the online learning community, and may participate in the mentorship program.

Students who complete DirecTrack to Teaching most often are interested in pursuing their M.Ed/initial teaching license through the University of Minnesota's Master of Education program. Students in DirecTrack to Teaching complete their undergraduate degrees in their content area of choice, which allows them to complete the extensive prerequisite coursework for the M.Ed. program.

The benefits of DirecTrack to Teaching are described as receiving priority admission to the initial licensure program, being part of a community of fellow future teachers, gaining service learning experience, exploring the teaching profession, having

advising support for completing initial licensure prerequisites, and completing coursework to prepare students for the initial licensure program. In recent years, approximately 50-60 new students are recruited each year. In conjunction with approximately 40 graduating seniors and attrition throughout the academic year, enrollment stays between 100-120 active students. DirecTrack to Teaching is overseen by one faculty program coordinator with administrative and advising support built in to a portion of one staff member's role.

With the 2017 relocation of DirecTrack to Teaching into the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, the faculty lead, along with department leadership, needed to decide how the program would grow in the future, what the main objectives were for the program, what coursework would be offered, and what benefits would be advertised to prospective students. To support DirecTrack to Teaching leadership in making these decisions, this evaluation began in 2018 by the departmental staff member who supported the DirecTrack to Teaching program coordinator. This evaluation consists of literature review, learning the inner workings of the program, observing current student experiences, surveying DirecTrack to Teaching students, and analyzing initial licensure survey data collected by the Office of Teacher Education.

Research Questions

This evaluation aims to answer these three questions:

1. Are the marketed benefits of DirecTrack to Teaching being actualized by students?
2. How do DirecTrack to Teaching students feel about their preparedness to enter the M.Ed./initial licensure program upon graduation?

3. Is there a difference in self-perceived preparedness or aspects of teaching ability post-graduation between M.Ed./initial licensure program students who had completed DirecTrack to Teaching and those who did not?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

DirecTrack to Teaching is a unique program in that its audience is undergraduate students who are preparing to enroll in a graduate level teacher education program. The benefits of the program are based in exposure to schools and learning as part of a multidisciplinary cohort of future teachers. The DirecTrack to Teaching website advertises the program as giving undergraduate students “early exposure to the culture of teaching and schools. Enter the profession with confidence and competence” (“DirecTrack to Teaching,” n.d.).

Theory of Teacher Development

Tang, Cheng, and Wong (2016) find three aspects of competence are essential for preparing teacher candidates to work in schools: “(1) understanding micro-political realities of schools; (2) social capital building; and (3) social strategies” (p. 151).

Tang et al. (2016) conclude that

“First, student teachers need to learn about the organisational dimension of teachers’ work and develop understanding of the micro-political realities of schools. Second, they need to develop competence in social capital building which involves soliciting affective and cognitive through establishing networks with multiple actors in schools. Third, expanding one’s repertoire of social strategies helps foster a sense of agency in the face of institutional constraints. Developing these three facets of competence enhances student teachers’ readiness to navigate places for themselves and negotiate complex school organisations” (p.160).

Micro-Political Realities

Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) define micro-political literacy as “the competence to understand the issues of power and interests in schools” (p. 765). There are three components that make up micro-political literacy, according to Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002): a knowledge aspect, an operational aspect, and an experiential aspect (p. 765). The knowledge aspect

“concerns the knowledge necessary to acknowledge (“see”), interpret and understand (“read”) the micro-political character of a particular situation. In other words, the ‘micro-politically literate’ teacher is capable of “reading” situations in political terms, because s/he masters the necessary “grammatical” and “lexical” knowledge of processes of power and struggles of interests” (p. 765).

The operational aspect is a “repertoire of micro-political strategies and tactics a teacher is capable to effectively apply (how broad is the repertoire; how high the degree of mastery?) in order to establish, safeguard or restore desirable working conditions (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 765). The operational aspect “refers to the political literacy of the teacher: to what extent and under what conditions is s/he capable of effectively influencing the situation, either proactively or reactively” (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 765). The experiential aspect “refers to the degree of (dis)satisfaction the teacher feels about his/her micro-political literacy” (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 766).

Through micro-political literacy, Tang et al. (2016) suggest from their findings that the student teachers had a greater understanding of how teachers work within schools as bureaucratic organizations, how teachers managed social-professional relationships alongside the culture of the school, and the professional demands of being a teacher (p.157).

Social Capital Building

Tang et al. (2016) find that “the student teachers’ engagement in social capital building was manifested in proactive networking, as well as gaining access to affective and cognitive support from mentors and peers” (p. 157). Fox and Wilson (2015) also note the impact of social capital building through peers:

“Peer BTs [beginning teachers] also hold relevant intellectual capital and can, through developing strong relationships, support practice development through collaboration. Together, these relationships support BTs in developing how to ‘act’ and ‘think’ like a teacher. If BTs develop strong links then they can also benefit from the chance to be reassured and encouraged. It is within these important relationships that BTs can explore their commitment to the profession, finding support to make the transformation into ‘feeling’ like a teacher” (p.23).

Agency

Tang et al. (2016) found agency important, where “student teachers adopted various social strategies to handle their ideas and actions in the face of institutional constraints, shaping desirable conditions for performing professional tasks and negotiating a sense of congruence in the placement schools” (p. 157). Fox and Wilson (2015) similarly finds that “the social capital developed will not only help them overcome the stresses and demands of ITE [initial teacher education] but will provide them with the self-efficacy and resilience to develop as professionals once employed” (p. 26)

Application

The framework from Tang et al. suggests teacher candidates are best prepared to work in schools when they understand the micro-political realities of schools, have built social capital, and have developed social strategies for agency. DirecTrack to Teaching is a program that prepares future educators for M.Ed./initial licensure programs following

this framework, specifically regarding micro-political literacy and social capital building, which leads to the development of agency. DirecTrack to Teaching aims to expose future teachers to K-12 schools through a teachers' lens for the first time, to provide a space for social networking with other future teachers across content areas, and to provide opportunities for future mentorship through service learning teachers. This study evaluated the effectiveness of DirecTrack to Teaching.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions

1. Are the marketed benefits of DirecTrack to Teaching being actualized by students?
2. How do DirecTrack to Teaching students feel about their preparedness to enter the M.Ed./initial licensure program upon graduation?
3. Is there a difference in self-perceived preparedness or aspects of teaching ability post-graduation between M.Ed./initial licensure. students who had completed DirecTrack to Teaching and those who did not?

Research Design

This evaluation is designed as a summative evaluation. Bloom, Hastings, and Maudaus (1971) define summative evaluation as a “type of evaluation used at the end of a term, course, or program for purposes of grading, certification, evaluation of progress, or research on the effectiveness of a curriculum, course of study, or educational plan” (p. 117). This evaluation primarily utilizes survey results from students completing a program (DirecTrack to Teaching or M.Ed./Initial Licensure Program) to determine the value of DirecTrack to Teaching.

Data Sources

Data for this evaluation comes from several sources. To answer the first two research questions, three surveys were created and distributed by DirecTrack to Teaching program staff. One survey was distributed to graduating students in 2018, one survey was distributed to newly admitted students who began the program in Fall 2018, and an Exit Survey has been distributed to all students opting to leave the program from Fall 2017 to Summer 2019. These surveys were performed on a wholly separate set of students from the surveys used to answer the third research question but were meant to gather more contextual information about how students felt leaving the DirecTrack to Teaching program (many who would soon be starting the M.Ed./initial licensure program), and what drove incoming DirecTrack to Teaching students to join the program. The surveys for graduating and incoming students in 2018 were anonymous surveys distributed via Qualtrics. The Exit survey results are identified (results are anonymous for this evaluation) and were collected using Google Forms.

To answer the third research question, data came from College of Education and Human Development Dean's Office and the Office of Teacher Education. Staff in the Dean's Office provided a list of students in DirecTrack to Teaching through 2018. Staff in the Office of Teacher Education used this list of students to identify DirecTrack to Teaching students and provided deidentified survey results from three surveys distributed to M.Ed./initial licensure program students each year. All information was deidentified and was coded using unique identifiers for students across all three surveys so results could be compiled for each student.

The three surveys distributed by the Office of Teacher Education are the Exit Survey, Transition to Teaching Survey, and Survey of Supervisors of First-Year Teachers. The Exit Survey is given to students as they complete their one year licensure program. The Transition Teaching Survey is then given to students one year after they completed the licensure program, and the Survey of Supervisors is also given one year post licensure to the students' supervisor. For this data analysis, results were used from the 2016-2017 Exit Survey, 2017-2018 Transition to Teaching Survey, and 2017-2018 Survey of Supervisors. Using these three specific years of surveys ensured that analysis was performed on one cohort of M.Ed./initial licensure program students.

Data Analysis

Separate regression analyses were conducted using three dependent variables. Each dependent variable was drawn from a different survey. The variables were:

- Exit Survey (variable b1a_subj: "To what extent do you agree or disagree that your teacher preparation program gave you the basic skills to do the following: Effectively teach the subject matter in my licensure area.")
- Transition to Teaching Survey (variable b1a_lic): "To what extent do you agree or disagree that your teacher preparation program prepared you to do the following: Effectively teach the subject matter in my licensure area.")
- Survey of Supervisors (variable B1a_area): "To what extent do you agree or disagree that this first-year teacher does the following: Effectively teaches the subject matter in his/her licensure area."

Associations between predictors and dependent variables were tested using stepwise regression. The predictors were drawn from two categories of questions that

appeared on the surveys involving “Instructional Practice” and “Diverse Learners.” These groups of variables were selected as predictors because each section appeared on all three surveys and asked similar questions. These categories of predictors are concerned with the teacher’s ability to develop, plan, and assess instruction, and how the teacher works with diverse groups of students by developing instruction to meet a wide range of needs. These predictors were hypothesized to be likely predictors of preparedness to teach the subject matter in the teacher’s licensure area.

Data from the three surveys were matched based on each student’s unique identifier. Demographic variables including gender, race/ethnicity, and grade levels taught (early childhood, elementary, middle school, high school) were included in each regression. Stepwise regression using an alpha level of .05 was used to control the entry of predictors other than the demographic variables.

In the Exit Survey, the categories included in the regressions were Preparation for Teaching: Instructional Practice, Preparation for Teaching: Diverse Learners. In the Preparation for Teaching: Instructional Practice category, students completing their initial teacher licensure were asked if their program gave them the basic skills to teach, such as providing student with feedback, effectively utilizing assessment, selecting instructional strategies, and help students with critical thinking processes. The Preparation for Teaching: Diverse Learners category of survey questions asks if the teacher preparation program gave students the basic skills to differentiate instruction based on learning needs, students with culturally and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds and communities, developmental skill levels, English learners, and mental health needs.

In the Transition to Teaching Survey, the categories of items included as predictors were Preparation for Teaching: Instructional Practice and Preparation for Teaching: Diverse Learners. In the Preparation for Teaching: Instructional Practice category, graduates of the M.Ed./initial licensure program were asked, after their first year of teaching, if their program gave them the basic skills to teach, such as providing student with feedback, effectively utilizing assessment, selecting instructional strategies, and help students with critical thinking processes. The Preparation for Teaching: Diverse Learners category of survey questions asks if the teacher preparation program gave M.Ed./initial licensure students the basic skills to differentiate instruction based on learning needs, students with culturally and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds and communities, developmental skill levels, English learners, and mental health needs.

In the Employer Survey, the categories of items included as predictors were Instructional Practice and Diverse Learners. In the Instructional Practice category, supervisors of first year teachers were asked if the teacher such as provides student with feedback, effectively utilizes assessment, selects instructional strategies, and helps students with critical thinking processes. In the Preparation for Teaching: Diverse Learners category of survey questions, supervisors were asked if the teachers are able to successfully teach students with culturally and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds and communities, developmental skill levels, English learners, mental health needs, and if they are able to differentiate instruction based on learning needs.

Sampling Methods

For all surveys, census sampling methods were used as the population being sampled was known.

Limitations

This study has two primary limitations. First, no baseline data were collected. Therefore, it is unclear whether individuals in the DirecTrack to Teaching group may have exhibited different baseline scores upon entry into the M.Ed./initial licensure program compared to students who had not participated in DirecTrack to Teaching. Second, the surveys distributed by the Office of Teacher Education (Exit Survey, Transition to Teaching Survey, Survey of Supervisors Survey) did not include a question for respondents to identify as having completed DirecTrack to Teaching. To create the data set, survey results were matched with compiled lists of past DirecTrack to Teaching students and matched on student ID number. This introduces possible room for error in identifying M.Ed./initial licensure students who had completed DirecTrack to Teaching.

Chapter 4: Results









Benefits of Program

The marketed benefits are







1. Priority admission for initial licensure program
2. Community of fellow future teachers
3. Service learning experience
4. Exploring the teaching career
5. Advising support to complete prerequisites
6. Coursework to prepare for initial licensure program

Incoming Fall 2018 admits were asked, “Based on your expectations of DirecTrack, please rank these benefits of the program in terms of importance to you (1 being the most important)”. Of the 62 responses, “Exploring the teaching career” was

picked as the most important benefit by 18 students, and “Priority admission for the initial licensure program” was picked as the most important benefit by 17 students. As seen in the list below, none of the other benefits were nearly this high.

1	
 Priority admission for initial licensure program	17
 Community of fellow future teachers	6
 Service learning experience	5
 Exploring the teaching career	18
 Advising support to complete prerequisites	5
 Coursework to prepare you for initial licensure program	5
 Other	0
 Other	0

Similarly, graduating students in Spring 2018 were asked this same question based on their time in the program, “How would you rank these benefits of DirecTrack?” Again, “Exploring the teaching career” was selected as the most important benefit with 5 students selecting this option. “Priority admission for initial licensure program” was again the second most frequently selected top benefit, this time along with “Service learning experience” both with 4 students selecting each benefit.

1	
 Priority admission for initial licensure program	4
 Community of fellow future teachers	3
 Service learning experience	4
 Exploring the teaching career	5
 Advising support to complete prerequisites	0
 Coursework to prepare you for initial licensure program	2

Graduating students were also asked an open ended question, “Were there any advertised benefits of DirecTrack that you feel you did not receive?” Of the 10 responses,

four students said they had received all the advertised benefits, one student mentioned that the mentor program could be more effective (likely relating to the benefits of “community of fellow teachers” and “exploring the teaching career”), two students noted that students previously were guaranteed admission to M.Ed./initial licensure program but this was changed to only preferred admission while they were in DirecTrack to Teaching which felt misleading, one student stated a preference for more scholarship opportunities, one student felt that the advising of the program could be more organized and streamlined, and one student had expected to take more education courses while participating in DirecTrack to Teaching.

For additional understanding of students’ perception of DirecTrack to Teaching, we can look to the Exit Survey that is completed by students choosing to leave the program. Of the 32 students who completed the survey and were asked what made them decide to leave, 18 students (56%) responded that they realized that they didn’t want to be a K-12 teacher. Of those 18 responses, four students said they realized they wanted to teach at a different level (early childhood, elementary, or college), four students said they wanted to pursue a different career instead, and 10 realized teaching was not the right path for them. While determining if teaching is correct path for students isn’t an explicit objective of the program, it is an outcome of “exploring the teaching career” and appears to be beneficial to students. Additionally, students were asked if participating in DirecTrack to Teaching helped them to clarify their future goals. Of the 32 respondents, 27 students (84%) responded “yes”.

Perceptions of Preparedness

Of the 18 graduating DTT students in Spring 2018 who responded to the survey, 17 answered that they were accepted into an initial licensure program, one student reported not being accepted into an initial licensure program, and zero students answered that they did not apply to an initial licensure program. Students were then asked, “If you were accepted into an initial licensure program, how do you feel that you compare to other candidates? Please explain how you perceive your preparedness to being the initial licensure program”. Below are their answers.

I feel relatively well prepared, but largely due to my continued experience writing papers in college thanks to additional coursework and with social justice training I received.
I feel extra prepared compared to some of the other candidates but on par with others.
I feel confident in being prepared, through DTT and my own experiences working with students
I feel equal in that we all have different ideas to the table and work well together.
I feel prepared compared to everyone else. We all have varying degrees of experience and our backgrounds are all different.
MUCH BETTER PREPARED
I feel prepared and excited

<p>Very prepared. I am very knowledgeable in my content area (high GPA) and I have a multitude of experiences working with students</p>
<p>I feel that DirecTrack helped me a lot in being accepted, it is a way to start thinking like a teacher before being accepted into the ILP</p>
<p>I feel prepared, perhaps more so than other candidates who may not have had opportunities during their undergraduate degree to explore and get involved within the education world. I don't feel that the DTT courses covered those aspects (classroom management styles and creating assessments) as much and I also did not get experience with those things through my service-learning</p>
<p>I feel like I have the upper hand to students who don't have the experience that I do</p>
<p>I'm behind in the social justice aspects. I have a lot of catching up to do. I'm not sure I am the most advanced student out there, but I'm still excited</p>
<p>DirecTrack helped prepare me logistically in the sense that I have all the prerequisite courses done so I can start my graduate/ILP courses right away. It also helped me interpersonally. I have so many wonderful connections with fellow future teachers and staff that I wouldn't have had otherwise. That has been by far the most impactful part of the program for me. Thank you!</p>
<p>I feel ready and excited to start.</p>
<p>I feel extra prepared compared to those who didn't participate in directrack</p>
<p>I don't feel as prepared as other students that have also gotten into the ILP. I believe that DirecTrack could have prepared me more with more classes to take on equity and gender and women's studies.</p>

I feel much more prepared knowing what an actual classroom is like to handle as opposed to going in with only the knowledge I had while being a participant in one while in highschool

Preparedness to Teach in Licensure Area

To determine if DirecTrack to Teaching students had statistically different survey results compared to non-DirecTrack to Teaching students, stepwise regression was utilized to test the effect of predictors, including DirecTrack to Teaching. An alpha level of .05 was used. In the Exit Survey and Transition to Teaching survey, the students were asked the similar questions, which were used as two of the dependent variables: *“To what extent do you agree or disagree that your teacher preparation program prepared you to do the following: Effectively teach the subject matter in my licensure area.”* In the Employer Survey, the teachers’ supervisors were asked a similar question of the teacher, which was used as the third dependent variable: *“To what extent do you agree or disagree that this first-year teacher does the following: Effectively teaches the subject matter in his/her licensure area”*. This question was selected to determine if DirecTrack to Teaching students had a different level of preparedness to teach the subject matter in their licensure area than non-DirecTrack to Teaching students.

In the regressions involving the three dependent variables, DirecTrack to Teaching was not a significant predictor of effectiveness to teach subject matter in the licensure area. While the DirecTrack to Teaching variable was not found to be statistically significant, 10 predictors were found to be statistically significant predictors of teaching preparedness.

The following predictors had statistically significant associations with the dependent variable b1a_subj (To what extent do you agree or disagree that your teacher preparation program prepared you to do the following: Effectively teach the subject matter in my licensure area) on the Exit Survey:

Variable	Description
b1b_strat	Select instructional strategies to align with learning goals and standards
b1g_plan	Plan lessons with clear learning objectives/goals in mind
b1c_pers	Design activities where students engage with subject matter from a variety of perspectives
e_aian	American Indian or Alaskan Native
a15_high	High School

The following predictors had statistically significant associations with the dependent variable b1a_lic (To what extent do you agree or disagree that your teacher preparation program prepared you to do the following: Effectively teach the subject matter in my licensure area) on the Transition to Teaching Survey:

Variable	Description
b2a_dvrs	Effectively teach students from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds and communities
b1g_clear	Plan lessons with clear learning objectives/goals in mind
b1f_adjust	Regularly adjust instructional plans to meet students' needs
b1t_concl	Help students analyze multiple sources of evidence to draw sound conclusions
b1h_mod	Design and modify assessments to match learning objectives

The following predictors had statistically significant associations with the dependent variable B1a_area (To what extent do you agree or disagree that this first-year

teacher does the following: Effectively teaches the subject matter in his/her licensure area) on the Survey of Supervisors:

Variable	Description
B1b_goals	Selects instructional strategies to align with learning goals and strategies
B2f_mntl	Differentiates instruction for students with mental health needs
e_asian	Asian

Table 1. Models Predicting Preparedness Ratings from Exit Survey, Transition to Teaching Survey, and Employer Survey

Outcome	b1a_subj (Exit Survey)	b1a_lic (Transition Survey)	B1a_area (Employer Survey)
Predictors			
b1_strat	0.51*** (0.07)		
b1g_plan	0.21** (0.08)		
b1c_pers	.23** (0.07)		
b1g_clear		0.35*** (0.08)	
b1f_adjust		0.22** (0.06)	
b2a_dvrs		0.15* (0.06)	
b1t_concl		0.20** (0.06)	
b1h_mod		-0.17* (0.07)	
B1b_goals			0.86*** (0.06)
B2f_mntl			0.09** (0.03)
Gender	-0.13 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.08)	0.03 (0.78)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	-0.89* (0.41)	0.26 (0.43)	0.43 (0.36)
Asian	0.08 (0.16)	0.03 (0.16)	-0.40** (0.15)
Black	-0.26 (0.19)	-0.28 (0.20)	0.42 (0.25)
Hispanic or Latino	0.25 (0.17)	0.20 (0.19)	-0.19 (0.19)
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	N/A	N/A	N/A
White, non-Hispanic	0.20 (0.14)	0.17 (0.14)	-0.02 (0.15)
Early Childhood	0.04 (0.13)	-0.01 (0.13)	0.32 (0.17)
Elementary	0.002 (0.10)	-0.12 (0.10)	-0.20 (0.11)
Middle School	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.16 (0.09)	-0.04 (.09)
High School	-0.29** (-0.10)	-0.18 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.11)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Benefits of Program

Of the advertised benefits of DirecTrack to Teaching, “exploring the teaching career” appears to be the most significant aspect of the program to incoming and current students, and is being met through coursework and service learning. For example, one student commented that, “I feel much more prepared knowing what an actual classroom is like to handle as opposed to going in with only the knowledge while being a participant in one while in high school”. This comment speaks to a fundamental goal of DirecTrack to Teaching--to have students start to see the classroom from the teachers’ perspective, instead of the student perspective.

In response to asking students if they did not receive any of the advertised DirecTrack to Teaching benefits, one student responded that the mentorship program could be more effective. When students were asked if they participated in the mentorship, 6 of the 18 students responded saying they did not participate in the mentorship program. When students were asked to rate the effectiveness of the mentorship program, 0 students found it to be “very effective”, 7 students found it to be “effective”, 4 students found it to be “not very effective”, and 3 students found it to be “extremely ineffective”. The mentorship program is one component of DirecTrack to Teaching that can contribute greatly to building a “community of fellow future teachers” and perhaps is a missed opportunity as it currently exists. Through DirecTrack to Teaching students have the opportunity to become familiar with other students interested in other content areas as well as students interested in teaching both high school and middle school. This offers a variety that is seen less in the M.Ed./initial licensure program--once students are in their

Master's program, they are primarily completing coursework with students in their same content area.

In the open-ended survey results, several students responded with answers that were out of scope for this question but still provided informative feedback. Particularly from this question, and elsewhere in the survey, students mentioned that they thought they would be taking more education courses through DirecTrack to Teaching or would receive more coursework on teaching skills as well as social justice issues. Providing skills to teach is not an objective of DirecTrack to Teaching, however this feedback may indicate that students have varying degrees of understanding of what the DirecTrack to Teaching objectives. DirecTrack to Teaching coursework does discuss social justice and how students' identities will show up in their future classrooms. This is an area to explore more with current students to determine if more students have this same feedback or if the person giving this feedback had a unique experience.

For the benefit of "advising support to complete prerequisites", one student responded that program processes "felt unorganized and I sometimes felt on my own and needing to be self-sufficient to navigate the program and procedures". The prerequisite coursework for the M.Ed./initial licensure program can be complex and it is DirecTrack to Teaching's goal that all students completing the program have been able to work with staff and advisors to complete the required coursework for the M.Ed./initial licensure program. As DirecTrack to Teaching was relocated to a new program and there have been several staff changes, it would be beneficial to examine current processes to see if there are places to communicate program processes more clearly and/or more frequently to students.

The benefit of “coursework to prepare for the M.Ed./initial licensure program” is vague, however this survey response speaks to the objective of this benefit: “I feel that DirecTrack helped me a lot in being accepted [into the M.Ed./initial licensure], it is a way to start thinking like a teacher before being accepted into the ILP”. As noted previously, DirecTrack to Teaching aims to help undergraduates begin to think like teachers since, up until now, they have primarily only known the role of student.

In the open-ended responses asking if there were advertised benefits that students did not receive, none of the students commented on “exploring the teaching career”, which was rated by this same group of students as the most important benefit of the program. We cannot determine how students perceive this benefit from this survey but, since it was most important to them and was not mentioned in the responses to this question, this suggests students felt as though they were able to explore the teaching career satisfactorily through DirecTrack to Teaching. Another way to try and determine the effectiveness of this advertised benefit is through examining results from the Exit Survey of students who choose to leave the program. As noted earlier, 56% of students who chose to leave did so because they realized they no longer wanted to be a K-12 teacher, or a teacher at all, and 84% of students found that DirecTrack to Teaching helped to clarify their future goals.

While DirecTrack to Teaching doesn’t explicitly state that it has a goal of helping undergraduate students determine if teaching is the right path for them, this is a benefit to students. Since students at the U of M complete initial teacher licensure at the Master’s level, DirecTrack to Teaching provides a space for students to gain experience in schools and decide if pursuing a graduate degree is right for them. As a one year graduate

program can cost tens of thousands of dollars, allowing students to determine beforehand that they no longer want to be a teacher saves them this expense, and potentially gives them a chance to focus on another career while still in their undergraduate career.

Perception of Preparedness

In response to asking graduating students how they felt regarding their preparation to enter an M.Ed./initial licensure program, there were a range of responses. Some students reported feeling like they will be more prepared to enter the M.Ed./initial licensure program than students who didn't participate in DirecTrack to Teaching, some students responded feeling like they were more prepared to enter the M.Ed./initial licensure program because of other experiences they've gained outside of DirecTrack to Teaching, some felt like they would be on par with the rest of their M.Ed./initial licensure program cohort, and some felt like they were behind in areas of their education. These results are from one group of outgoing DirecTrack to Teaching students so these results cannot be applied to all DirecTrack to Teaching students, but it starts to provide insight into how DirecTrack to Teaching students perceive their preparedness to begin M.Ed./initial licensure program.

Notably, six students responded that they felt prepared or very prepared because of their overall experiences, not DirecTrack to Teaching alone. This may indicate that students who enter DirecTrack to Teaching tend to have different characteristics from students who do not participate in DirecTrack to Teaching. These students appear to be very active in gaining experiences in education and are self-motivated to find opportunities to interact with teaching. DirecTrack to Teaching students are choosing to participate in an additional undergraduate supporting program as they are passionate

about education. These students may tend to be high achievers who are highly motivated and are invested in K-12 education.

Students enter DirecTrack to Teaching for different reasons, which may impact how they view their preparedness. One student responded:

DirecTrack helped prepare me logistically in the sense that I have all the prerequisite courses done so I can start my graduate/ILP courses right away. It also helped me interpersonally. I have so many wonderful connections with fellow future teachers and staff that I would have had otherwise. That has been by far the most impactful part of the program for me.

This student found that the guidance to complete prerequisite coursework and build social networks contributed most to feeling prepared to begin an M.Ed./initial licensure program. In future surveys, it would be helpful to have more specific questions around various areas of preparedness (prerequisites, school culture, social connections, etc.) to get their feedback on each aspect that the program hopes to offer.

Additionally, two students responded that they did not feel prepared in areas of social justice, equity, gender, and women's studies. This feedback provides several different insights. DirecTrack to Teaching aims to have a social justice oriented curriculum, which aligns with the M.Ed./initial licensure program curriculum. With the program transition over the past several years, this content could be presented differently between different instructors and addressed differently between service learning sites. It should also be considered that DirecTrack to Teaching students take two 2-credit courses as a part of DirecTrack to Teaching, which meet every other week during the semester in which they are offered. It is outside the scope of this evaluation but students were asked about the course load for DirecTrack to Teaching. Both incoming and graduating DirecTrack to Teaching students were asked if they would have been interested in taking

more courses as part of DirecTrack to Teaching. Of the 18 responses from graduating students, 15 students (83%) responded “yes”, that they would have liked to take more than the two 2-credit courses. Incoming students answered similarly. Of the 58 responses from incoming students, 38 students (66%) responded “yes”.

Students were asked if they would prefer that DirecTrack to Teaching was a minor or certificate instead of a supporting program. Fifteen graduating students (83%) responded “yes”, that they would like the program to have an official designation and to appear on their transcript. Of the incoming students, 34 (59%) also responded “yes”. Students were asked follow-up questions that will be shared with program staff separately.

With feedback from graduating students varying from saying they feel “much better prepared” for M.Ed./initial licensure program compared to students who did not participate in DirecTrack to Teaching, to students who feel underprepared, this question should be researched with more in-depth methods longitudinally. This survey question in the future could be developed to provide more detailed and useful answers, however it is notable that students did not respond to this question in regard to their understanding of school culture. As this is a major objective of DirecTrack to Teaching, it would be helpful to ask about this more directly to determine how students were or were not impacted by that aspect of the curriculum.

Preparedness to Teach in Licensure Area

It was initially theorized that DirecTrack to Teaching students may be more prepared to teach in their licensure area because they had early and additional exposure to school culture and curriculum around teaching. Even though a number of DirecTrack to

Teaching students felt as though they were very prepared or more prepared than non-DirecTrack to Teaching students entering the M.Ed./Initial licensure program, no baseline data were collected to make this determination. If DirecTrack to Teaching students were more prepared when they entered the M.Ed./initial licensure program, the lack of difference at posttest, compared to non-DirecTrack to Teaching graduates, indicates a negative effect of DirecTrack to Teaching. However, it is also possible that DirecTrack to Teaching students were less prepared upon entry into the M.Ed./initial licensure program compared to other students. The results are consistent with the possibility that DirecTrack to Teaching students were less prepared upon entry into the M.Ed./initial licensure program but DirecTrack to Teaching was effective in raising their perceived level of preparation at posttest to the same level as other graduates.

The results are consistent with the objectives of DirecTrack to Teaching, which are more focused in determining fit for teaching and preparing students for the M.Ed./initial licensure program, rather than direct improvement of teaching capacity. If so, direct improvement of teaching capacity should not be listed as an expected benefit of the program. Alternatively, DirecTrack to Teaching staff might increase the number and depth of courses offered for the purpose of providing students with stronger preparation regarding teaching skills, strategies and capacity.

The 10 predictors that were found to have statistically significant associations with the dependent variables provide additional insight into factors that predict preparedness to teach. In the Exit Survey, the predictors that were found to have statistically significant associations with the dependent variable `bla_subj` were all focused on instructional methods, with no predictors coming from the Diverse Learners

category of predictors. After graduates finished their first year of teaching (Transition to Teaching Survey), almost all predictors with statistically significant associations with the dependent variable (b1a_lic) came from the Instructional Practices category, however one predictor with statistical significance did come from the Diverse Learners category: “Effectively teach students from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds and communities”. In the Survey of Supervisors, predictors from both the Instructional Strategies and Diverse learners had statistically significant associations with the dependent variable. This shows that as students complete their teacher licensure program, they may think successful teaching comes primarily from instructional methods, however once in the classroom, new teachers see that being able to teach a wide range of students is also key to providing effective teaching. The results suggest that this belief is held by first year teachers’ supervisors.

Several demographic variables were also found to have statistically significant associations with predicting preparedness to teach. American Indian and Alaskan Native M.Ed./initial licensure students and students teaching High School grade levels reported feeling less like their teacher preparation program prepared them to effectively teach in their licensure area. Asian students were found to have a lower rating from supervisors regarding preparation to teach in their licensure area.

Implications

While this evaluation did not find a statistically significant effect of DirecTrack to Teaching on preparedness of teachers after completion of the M.Ed./initial licensure program, the results of this evaluation provide useful information about the effectiveness and areas of improvement for DirecTrack to Teaching and other similar undergraduate

programs for future teachers. Overall, these results suggest that DirecTrack to Teaching and similar undergraduate programing should maintain a focus on exploration and learning the culture of schools, continue to focus on preparation to teach diverse learners, and determine how to give value to providing a space where students can determine whether or not they want to pursue teaching as a career.

As students reported “exploring the teaching career” to be the most important programmatic benefit, the mission of DirecTrack to Teaching seems to align with student needs. In future evaluations, it would be beneficial to determine students’ objective of exploring the teaching career. Some students may enter the program truly wanting to explore and determine if teaching is right for them, while others enter the program knowing they want to be teachers and the program offers a path to begin preparing for their career while they are still an undergraduate student.

The finding that DirecTrack to Teaching provides a valuable space for students to determine if teaching is the right fit is significant. While DirecTrack to Teaching is usually conceptualized as a feeder program into the M.Ed./initial licensure program, it is helpful that the program gives students an opportunity to explore teaching as a career and to confirm that this is the right career for them before embarking on a teaching career. This opportunity for discovery allows students to engage with their potential career path during a time when they can, relatively easily, transition their education towards a different career path if teaching isn’t the right fit. This may also be a service to the M.Ed./initial licensure program as students would be less likely to begin the program but stop out part way through after realizing teaching wasn’t the right fit.

The result of ability to “effectively teach students from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds and communities” being a statistically significant predictor of preparedness to teach highlights the importance of this program objective that is essential to the DirecTrack to Teaching program and the M.Ed./initial licensure program curriculum. This predictor was found to be significant in the surveys distributed to M.Ed./initial licensure program graduates after their first year of teacher, but not in the Exit survey that was given at the time of initial licensure. This indicates that after students taught for a year, they were able to see the importance of this teaching objective from their experiences with students in their classrooms. This provides evidence that the ability to effectively teach diverse learners should be an objective of other teacher preparation programs as it contributes to the preparedness of teachers.

The significant associations between the dependent variable in the Exit Survey and two demographic variables indicate areas for improvement and areas where future teachers can be better supported throughout their program.

Recommendations for DirecTrack to Teaching and Future Research

The area of mentorship is the primary area found to be in need of improvement. Of the 18 students that responded with feedback about the mentorship program, six students reported that they did not participate in the program. This is a large percentage of students missing out on an opportunity to build connections with other future educators and increase their social capital. Additionally, 7 out of 14 students responded saying that they found the mentorship program to be “not very effective” or “extremely ineffective”.

With the finding that DirecTrack to Teaching offers students a valuable space to determine if teaching is the right career path, it may be useful to reference this more clearly in the program benefits advertised to students. Perhaps the program benefit of “exploring the teaching career” could be broken into two potential benefits: determining if teaching is the right fit and learning about school culture.

Only one student provided feedback that the advising support could be more streamlined, however this could be the experience of more students. As there have been multiple staff changes within DirecTrack to Teaching support since 2017, it is recommended that these processes be reviewed to ensure students are receiving the support they need.

This evaluation didn’t include DirecTrack to Teaching coursework as a primary research question, however there does seem to be a desire among students for more coursework to be offered through this program. Additionally, a majority of students would like to be able to list DirecTrack to Teaching as an official program that they participated in (for example, a minor or a certificate). As some students would be less likely to enroll in the program if the course load was too high, it would be ideal to have two different tracks available where students can continue taking only the two required courses, or they can add additional credits to obtain a different result, perhaps a certificate or minor.

This study did not find a statistically significant difference between students who had completed DirecTrack to Teaching and those who did not regarding preparedness to teach in their licensure area, however research should be done to evaluate preparedness at the entry of the M.Ed./initial licensure program. As this evaluation did not utilize

pretest/posttest data, it is recommended that yearly pretest/posttest data be collected for incoming M.Ed./initial licensure students to see, over time, if there is a difference in preparedness at this stage for students who participated in DirecTrack to Teaching and those who did not. This could clarify whether or not students are, upon entry into the M.Ed./initial licensure program, arriving with different levels of preparedness but equalizing over the course of the licensure program. Future research could also look at other key components of teacher preparedness, such as ability to work with diverse learners.

It is recommended that DirecTrack to Teaching continues to distribute surveys to incoming students, graduating students, and students who choose to leave the program. Future surveys might ask more specific questions relating to each of the program's objectives and students' goals when entering the program (career exploration or specific learning objectives for teaching).

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